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SUBJECT: OPPOSITION SWEEPS LOCAL ELECTIONS; URI CHAIR
RESIGNS

REF: A. SEOUL 1642

[1](#)B. SEOUL 1779

[1](#)C. SEOUL 1732

[1](#)D. SEOUL 1791

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (SBU) As predicted (Ref A), the ruling Uri Party suffered a crushing defeat in the May 31 local elections. The opposition Grand National Party (GNP) won 12 of the 16 gubernatorial and major mayoral races, including Seoul, Busan, Daejeon, and the populous region surrounding Seoul, Gyeonggi Province. The Democratic Party won the Gwangju mayoral and South Jeolla gubernatorial posts. The Uri Party won only the governorship of North Jeolla Province, the birthplace of Uri Party Chairman Chung Dong-young. Chung appeared on nationwide television June 1 to apologize for the poor results and tender his resignation. Political circles are now churning with speculation over what impact the local elections will have on the 2007 presidential race. This much is clear: GNP Chairwoman Park Geun-hye's prospects are bright while the Uri Party is in tatters. END SUMMARY.

GNP TROUNCES FORMER URI MINISTERS IN SEOUL, BUSAN, GYEONGGI

[1](#)2. (SBU) GNP candidate Oh Se-hoon easily defeated the Uri Party's Kang Kum-sill in the Seoul mayoral race by over 30 percentage points. A 45-year-old attorney associated with environmental causes, Oh is a former GNP lawmaker and television celebrity. GNP insiders say that he was recruited to run as the only person capable of beating the Uri Party's Kang, who distinguished herself as the first female Justice Minister.

[1](#)3. (SBU) In Busan, incumbent mayor Hur Nam-sik (GNP) defeated Oh Geo-don (Uri), a former Minister of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (Ref B). All observers predicted that this race would be a blowout. Indeed, Hur defeated Oh 65.8% to 24%. Dissatisfaction with the Roh Administration appears to have hardened the Gyeongsang Provinces' long-standing loyalty to the conservative GNP.

[1](#)4. (SBU) In Gyeonggi Province, which surrounds Seoul, GNP lawmaker Kim Moon-soo defeated former Information and Communication Minister Chin Dae-je. Kim enjoyed a comfortable lead throughout the campaign, but few predicted that he would defeat Chin so readily, 59.6% to 31.3%.

GNP WINS EVEN DAEJEON

¶5. (SBU) In one of the election's most surprising races, Daejeon elected GNP's Park Sung-ho over incumbent mayor Yum Hong-chul (Uri). As reported Ref C, Yum had enjoyed a comfortable 46% lead in Daejeon, capitalizing on his personal popularity, political machinery he brought with him when he defected from GNP in 2005, and the Uri Party's initiative to build a new administrative city in the region. Park appears to have clearly benefited from a surge of sympathy following the May 20 attack upon GNP Chairwoman Park Geun-hye and then the Chairwoman's early release from the hospital to campaign in Daejeon (Ref D).

URI PARTY'S MORNING AFTER

¶6. (U) Uri Chairman Chung Dong-young announced his resignation in a televised statement June 1. He said that he failed to keep his promise to the citizens, would accept responsibility for the election, and step down. There is speculation that former Minister of Health Kim Geun-tae may assume the chairmanship, but the party said that an official decision has not yet been made. In brief comments, President Roh said the Administration would not waiver in focusing on major policies such as resolution of social disparity and concluding the U.S.-Korea Free Trade Agreement. Roh also stressed that a crisis is a true test of a party's capability.

¶7. (SBU) According to Professor Lee Nae-young, a specialist in elections and polling at Korea University, it is likely that an anti-Roh Moo-hyun faction within the ruling Uri party will separate and form a new coalition with Kim Dae-jung's Democratic Party (DP). Lee noted that although the DP won one more seat than the Uri Party, the two parties independently are not strong enough to compete against the

GNP and will have to form a coalition. Moreover, the DP does not have a competitive candidate to put forth in the upcoming presidential elections. Lee suggested that if a new party is formed, Goh Kun would likely lead the party. Lee noted that the GNP has a very important role to play now if it wants to maintain its support rate among the public. He opined that the GNP's landslide victory was not based on popularity for the party but on the lack of options for a better alternative.

FINAL ELECTION RESULTS

¶8. (U) The following are results from the 16 major races:

- Seoul: GNP
Oh Se-hoon (GNP) (60.5%) v. Kang Kum-sill (Uri) (27%)
- Gyeonggi Province: GNP
Kim Moon-soo (GNP) (59.6%) v. Chin Dae-je (Uri) (31.3%)
- Incheon: GNP
Ahn Sang-soo (GNP) (63.1%) v. Choi Ki-sun (Uri) (22.5%)
- Daejeon: GNP
Park Sung-ho (GNP) (44.6%) v. Yum Hong-chul (Uri) (41%)
- N. Chungcheong Province: GNP
Jung Woo-taek (GNP) (59.6%) v. Han Bum-deok (Uri) (30.3%)
- S. Chungcheong Province: GNP
Lee Wan-koo (GNP) (47%) v. Oh Young-kyo (Uri) (21.2%)
- Gwangju: DP
Park Kwang-tae (DP) (52.1%) v. Kim Jae-kyun (Uri) (34%)
- Gangwon Province: GNP
Kim Jin-sun (GNP) (73.2%) v. Lee Chang-bok (Uri) (20%)
- N. Jeolla Province: Uri
Kim Wan-ju (Uri) (48.2%) v. Jung Kyun-hwan (DP) (36.9%)

- S. Jeolla Province: DP
Park Joon-young (DP) (67.3%) v. Suh Bum-seok (Uri) (19.2%)
- N. Gyeongsang Province: GNP
Kim Kwan-yong (GNP) (76.9%) v. Park Myung-jae (Uri) (22.9%)
- S. Gyeongsang Province: GNP
Kim Tae-ho (GNP) (63.9%) v. Kim Doo-kwan (Uri) (24.4%)
- Ulsan: GNP
Park Maeng-woo (GNP) (63.2%) v. Roh Ok-hee (DLP) (11%)
- Daegu: GNP
Kim Bum-il (GNP) (70.9%) v. Lee Jae-yong (Uri) (20%)
- Busan: GNP
Huh Nam-sik (GNP) (65.8%) v. Oh Geo-don (Uri) (24%)
- Jeju Province: Independent
Kim Tae-hwan (Ind.) (42.7%) v. Hyun Myung-gwan (GNP) (41.4%)

COMMENT

19. (SBU) With over 50% turnout, the voters sent a clarion message of dissatisfaction to the ruling Uri Party. Opposition candidates easily defeated some of Uri Party's most popular figures -- from Kang in Seoul to Yum in Daejeon to Chin in Gyeonggi. Citizens concerned about the economy appeared disillusioned with a party strong on ideology and rhetoric but lacking in tangible results. The election also added some clarity to the upcoming presidential race. Failing to deliver in any region other than his birthplace, former Uri Chair Chung Dong-young's presidential aspirations have been dashed. Park Geun-hye's prospects, meanwhile, have significantly brightened. She emerged from the May 20 knife attack with an aura of stoicism, an undeniable ability to deliver GNP votes, and perhaps the respect necessary to keep the GNP from splintering prior to the presidential elections. The Uri Party, meanwhile, is facing internal turmoil. The local election is likely to accelerate a party split as Uri politicians hasten to disassociate themselves from the stain of this defeat. END COMMENT.

VERSHBOW